

## **The Nigerian State and Electoral Violence: An Interrogation of the 2019 General Elections in Rivers State**

**<sup>1</sup>Samuel B. Kalagbor & <sup>2</sup>Akani, Abubakar Ndanye**

<sup>1&2</sup>*Department of Public Administration,  
Captian Elechi Amadi Polytechnic,  
Rumuola, Port Harcourt, Rivers State*

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### **Abstract**

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Periodic election is regarded as one of the most important elements of modern democracies. For with liberal democratic orientation, the regular periodic elections remain the best option for the selection of government and leaders. The relevance of regular periodic elections is captured in Article 21(3) of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. However, since Nigeria attained flag independence in 1960, the conduct of peaceful, free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria had remained a herculean task. Elections in Nigeria has been fraught with extreme violence, perpetrated by political players and their agents, using the coercive apparatus of the State. Regrettably, the Nigerian State has often employed or deployed security agencies to perpetrate election violence and intimidate opposition and even the public. Against this background, this paper interrogated the State-related violence in the 2019 general elections as experienced in Rivers State. The study draws attention to the reports of domestic and foreign Elections Observer Missions during the elections. Qualitative research method was used to obtain data. The Marxist Theory of Post-Colonial State was applied in explaining electoral violence in the 2019 General Elections in Rivers State. This study revealed that political actors used State security apparatchiks; the army and police, to perpetrate electoral violence during the 2019 general elections in Rivers State. In order to mitigate election violence and ensure good governance, a continuous review of the electoral laws, and punishment of electoral violence offenders and professionalization of the armed forces become inevitable.

**Keywords:** *The State, Security Agencies, Electoral Violence, Rivers State, Democracy*

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Corresponding Author: **Samuel B. Kalagbor**

### **Background to the Study**

Electoral violence is perhaps one of the most challenging problems facing democracy in Africa and other developing countries of the world today. Election is a systematic process of selecting some individuals out of several others to occupy public positions of trust for the general public. As a recognized means of involving people in governance process, election guarantees the possibility of winning the consent of the people, on whose behalf political power is then exercised (Jacob and Akintola, 2019, 84-89). Thus, the moral justification of democracy derives from free, fair and credible elections. Furthermore, the fundamental position occupied by election is stressed in Article 21(3) of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states inter-alia “the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures” (Article 21(3), UDHR). By this, the integrity and credibility of the electoral process becomes sacrosanct. This is because modern democracies place much premium on free, fair, credible elections. In line with this, Chikendu (2003, 103) highlights four basic conditions necessary for the holding of free and fair elections:

1. An honest competent non-partisan administration to run election.
2. A general acceptance throughout the political community of certain rules of the game, which limit the struggle for power because of some unspoken sentiments that if the rules are not observed more or less faithfully, the game itself will disappear observed more or less faithfully, the game itself will disappear amid the wreckage at the whole system;
3. A developed system of political parties, traditions and terms for candidates before electors as alternatives to choose from and
4. An independent judiciary to interpret electoral laws.

However, since flag independence in 1960, the conduct of peaceful, free, fair and credible elections in Nigeria has remained a herculean task. Elections in Nigeria has been generally fraught with extreme violence, perpetrated by political players and their agents. The situation is such that, arguably, Nigeria has not recorded any hitch free election since or even before independence in 1960. All elections held preparatory to and after independence – 1959, 1964, 1965 (Western Region), 1979, 1983, 1993, 1999, 2003 and 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019, failed to satisfy the basic cannons of free and fair elections (Ekekwe, 2011, 9). These elections has generally witnessed wanton violence, intimidation of opposition and loss of human lives and properties. The question then arises, who are the major perpetrators of electoral violence in Nigeria? There have emerged two opposing poles that have critically offered responses to this fundamental question. On the one side is a more popular position indicting the government in power (the State). This position holds that more than the opposition party, the State employs the use of violence to influence the outcome of elections. According to Ekekwe (2011) those who are currently in power feel very reluctant to relinquish it even when their unpopularity has become obvious. Instead, in the face of their unpopularity and mass discontent, they have the tendency to resort to oppression, intimidation, denials etc., using the coercive instrument of the State to unleash terror and intimidate the society, especially members of the opposition (9-10).

Furthermore, at the Joint European Commission and United Nations Development Programme Workshop titled “Elections, Violence and Conflict Prevention” which held in Barcelona on June 2011, the debate on whether it is the opposition/weakest party or the incumbent that uses or employs electoral violence to rig votes and influence the outcome of elections dominated the front burner. Many of the participants out-rightly rejected the position of linking the opposition to employing electoral violence to rig votes. They rather are of the strong view that, it is the incumbent and government in power that usually possess a greater capacity in terms of resources and coercive State apparatus to perpetrate violence and rig elections.

This study is influenced by the above debate. The study argue that the Nigeria State is the major perpetrator of electoral violence to rig elections in the face of their unpopularity and mass discontent, using the coercive apparatus of the State (Military, Police, among others). To establish this fact, this paper adopted a different method by systematically interrogating State-related electoral violence, drawing attention to the reports of very reputable domestic and foreign elections monitoring teams and observer missions during the 2019 general elections in Rivers State.

Reports of some reputable domestic and foreign elections monitoring and observer missions such as, the European Union (EU), United Kingdom (UK), Human Rights Watch (HRW), International Republican Institute (IRI), National Democratic Institute (NDI) Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) and Integrity Friends for Truth and Peace Initiative (TIFPI), were most qualified for examination by this study. They command a high level of integrity and consistency. Remarkably too, their reports are widely adjudged as the most, if not the only, objective and reliable sources of data on the 2019 general elections, as opposed to newspapers reports, political parties and INEC which may be partisan. It is pertinent to note that some data from news reports were proportionately gathered, they aim at presenting a general account of electoral violence by State actors- Nigerian Army and Police during the 2019 elections in Rivers State.

### **Electoral Violence: Conceptual Explications**

To begin with, what is violence? Violence as a phenomenon remains a ubiquitous term in political science. It means different things to different people. Gurr (1970), (as cited in Idowu 2019), argued that violence is a complex phenomenon which has other forms and they are categorized as; Turmoil-low scale violence such as relative spontaneous, unorganized political violence with substantial popular participation, including violent political strikes, riots, political clashes, and localized rebellions. Conspiracy – medium scale violence such as highly organized political violence with limited participation, including organized political assassinations, small scale terrorism, small-scale guerilla wars, coup d'etat, and mutinies. Internal war- a higher scale violence such as highly organized political violence with widespread popular participation, designed to overthrow the regime or dissolve the State and accompanied by extensive violence, including large-scale terrorism and guerilla wars, civil wars, and revolution (19). Electoral violence is regarded as a sub-category of political violence that is primarily distinguished by its timing and motive. It is a coercive and deliberate strategy

used by political actors- incumbents as well as opposition parties to advance their interests or achieve specific political goals in relation to an electoral contest. It may take place in all parts of the electoral cycle: in the run-up to elections, on the day of elections, and in the immediate post-election period. Election- related violence is not limited to physical violence but includes other coercive means, such as the threat of violence, intimidation and harassment.

On the other hand, electoral violence are acts or threats physically, psychologically, and structurally, aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a political stakeholder before, during and after an election. He further stressed that electoral violence could occur in the form of physical assault, assassination of political opponents or people perceived as a threat to one's political ambition, burning down of public or opponent's properties, partisan harassment by security agents, arrest, forceful dispersal of rallies, or shooting, wounding or killing of people, kidnapping and hostage taking, bombing of infrastructure, forceful disruption by thugs of political and campaign rallies, destruction of ballot boxes and ballot papers by thugs or partisan security agents. The phenomenon of electoral violence involves all forms of organized acts of threats aimed at intimidating, harming, blackmailing a political stakeholder or opponent before, during and after an election with an intention to determine, delay or influence an electoral process (Albert 2007, in Nwolise, 2007, 5).

It does appear that electoral violence is a special and organized form of violence. This accounts for the reason Fischer (2002, 3) defined electoral conflict and violence as any random or organized act or threat to intimidate, physically harm, blackmail, or abuse a political stakeholder in seeking to determine, delay, or to otherwise influence an electoral process. It is indeed appalling that intellectual discussions and debate on the specter of election violence in Nigeria is completely divorced from the State. This seems to have beclouded a critical analysis of the problem. Historically, electoral violence in Nigeria is linked to the State, and those that have direct or indirect ties with the State. From one government to the other, those who managed State powers have always romanced and hobnobbed with elements- State apparatchiks (the military and police, and even political thugs). The romance with these elements is the proclivity to use crude force, violence and thuggery to influence the outcome of elections. The dominant nature of politics is the struggle and competition to capture State powers to make authoritative allocation of values and resources, and to enforce binding decisions and policies, maintenance of law and order, protection of lives and properties, and to punish offenders.

In his study titled "Electoral Conflict and Violence" Fischer (2002) using snapshots from 2001 electoral calendar argued that there are four descriptive categories of conflict and electoral violence that emerge, suggesting a variety of motives, victims and perpetrators.

1. Voters in conflict with the state and claiming unfairness in the election process (Thailand, Zambia):
2. The state in conflict with voters who challenge the elections results or the electoral hegemony of the state (Chad, Belarus):
3. Political rivals in conflict with each other for political gain (Yemen, Benin, Philippines, Fiji, Seychelles, Pakistan, The Gambia, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka): or

4. A blending of these three categories (Fischer, 2002, 4).

The character and nature of the Nigerian State cannot be overemphasized. In strong terms, extant studies show that the incumbent, using State apparatuses, is the major and main perpetrator of electoral violence. For instance, Hafner-Burton, Hyde and Jablonski (2012), Chaturvedi (2005), and Mehler (2007) in their studies showed that it is the incumbent (State) that is the main perpetrator of electoral violence, using enormous State apparatus (example given, the military) at its beck and call. Considering the character of the State, we argue that the coercive nature of the State apparatus and the substantive government in power contributes to explain the deployment of violence by the State during elections.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To enhance effective theoretical guidance, this study is anchored on the Marxist theory of Post-Colonial State. The major proponent of the Marxist theory of Post-Colonial State is Hamza Alavi. The central plank of Alavi's theory is that the specificity of the character and nature of the colonial state has made the post-colonial States as autonomous and most powerful class. The powers (bureaucracy, the coercive apparatus: police, army, prisons, the judiciary) in the post-colonial societies is collapsed in the Post-Colonial States. Alavi, (as cited in Ekekwe 1986) argued that:

*In the post-colonial society, because a foreign bourgeoisie used the colonial state apparatuses to subjugate all the indigenous social classes, it might be said that the super-structure in the colony is therefore overdeveloped in relation to the structure in the colony, for its basis lies in the metropolitan structure itself, from which it is later separated at the time of independence. The post-colonial state inherits that over-developed apparatus of state and its institutionalized practices through which the operations of the indigenous social classes are regulated and controlled (Ekekwe, 1986, 13).*

Alavi and other radical Marxists argue that the State remains a creature and manifestation of irreconcilability of class struggle. According to Ake (1981) what distinguishes the state from other social institutions is that, apart from being the ultimate coercive power, it makes exclusive claim to the legitimate use of coercive force (126).

However, there is no definition of the State that commands a universal appeal. According to Ekekwe (1986), Miliband argued that the State is not a thing; it does not as such exist. What "the State" stands for is several institutions which, together, constitute its reality and which interact as parts of what may be called the state system. Miliband adds that in this system, it is the government not to be confused simply with the party in power that actively represents the State, and that this does not mean that the State is always effectively controlled by the government. According to Miliband, other constituent elements in the state system, include the bureaucracy, the coercive apparatus (police, army, prisons) the judiciary and the lowest levels of government that exist in the formation. He further points that the question of checks and balances which may exist among these elements should not obscure the essential unity that exists between them (p. 10).

However, the Marxist conception of State is a radical and ideological contradiction to the liberal conception of State. The liberal school of thought conceives the State as neutral; it merely balances things out between competing elite groups. According to this view, there is no ruling class as such in society: therefore, State power is not exercised in favor of any such class. In contrast to these views, the classical Marxist school of thought see the State as maintaining law and order in which the interests of the ruling class are favored in the long run. This is because it preserves the conditions under which the bourgeois (ruling) class is dominant (Ekekwe, 1986:10).

Ake (1981) argued that we have a State that is interventionist and involved in the class struggle, a State already dragged into politics and politicized. Partly because of this fact (who's significant is the perception of the State as being very partial), and partly because the State power in question is highly developed, there is a bitter struggle to gain control of it. A critical focus of this struggle is the control of government, which is the formal access to state power. Thus, in Africa those in office do all they can to perpetuate their hold on it, and those out of office do all they can to get it; there is hardly any restraint beyond prudence as to permissible means for this struggle (128-129).

The application of the Marxist theory of Post-Colonial State to this study is that an understanding of the character and nature of the Post-Colonial Nigerian State will enhance our understanding of the State perpetrated violence in the 2019 General elections in Rivers State. It is from this very perspective that the penchant for the use of violence to win elections by the Nigeria State can be best comprehended. The Nigerian State (led by the government in power) sees the geographical area called Nigeria as a political empire that must be conquered with coercion and brute force. In addition to its normal security forces at its beck and call, the State also has the capacity (due to abundant oil revenue at its control) to employ and service armed thugs that can be utilized to promote and maintain its political power and to subsequently advance its economic interest. For the Nigerian State, "opposition" does not mean co-contestant, rather it connotes to an enemy on the battlefield that must be crushed completely.

It is to these multifarious manifestations of the Post-Colonial Nigerian State that we now turn our investigatory and analytic attention. The dynamic operation and analytic relevance of the theory of Post-Colonial State will become pellucid and evident as we proceed to interrogate the 2019 general elections violence in Rivers States. But first, let us further examine the character of the Nigerian State and politics. Politics is the struggle to capture the powers of the state to make authoritative allocation of values and resources, make binding decisions and polices, maintain law and order, protect lives and property, and sanction offender of the law. The very existence of a State is based on its monopoly of power. Consequently, the character of the State and how it exercises its monopoly of power determines almost every other thing in the society (Alapiki, 2015, 28). It is to the character of State that we now turn to.

### **Character of the Nigerian State**

Remarkably, Alapiki (2015), stressed that the State in Africa and peripheral capitalist societies

assumes and performs functions especially in the economy, different from those in the advanced capitalist societies (24). The State and its institutions have been hijacked by powerful men who turned the State apparatus into instruments for perpetuation of class interest, willful alienation and self-reproduction. Pointedly, Ake (as cited in Alapiki 2015) made this point more pellucid when he characterized the State in Nigeria thus:

*The unique feature of the State in Nigeria, and this is typical of periphery capitalist formations generally is that, the state has limited autonomy. That is, the State is institutionally constituted in such a way that it enjoys little independence from the social classes, particularly the hegemonic class and so is immersed in the struggle of the class (in Nigeria). There may well be a case of talking about political administration or government instead of State. It does not matter what we call it as long as we are clear about its objective character and how it differs from the pure ideas of State (Alapiki, 2015, 24-25).*

In the same vein, according to Dudley (1973), politics in Nigeria remains the shortest cut to wealth and affluence:

*Politics has become the shortcut to affluence and influence in Nigeria. To be a member of the government means open access to government patronages, contract deals, among others. But once, having known the profitability of having power, the party and the individual members uses government machinery to stay in power. The leadership becomes a self-recruiting oligarchy, and as such does not tolerate opposition to itself (3).*

What this means is that under this kind of State, justice and fair play is not guaranteed in politics wherein, the State is also a competitor. Furthermore, economic and political competition becomes "Hobbesian" (nasty and brutish). Ake (as cited in Alapiki 2015) argued this has remained the character of Nigeria's politics where:

*Contending groups struggle on grimly, polarizing their differences and convinced that their ability to protect their interests and to obtain justice is co-extensive with power. That creates the politics of anxiety. In this type of politics, there is deep alienation and distrust among political competitors. Consequently, they are profoundly afraid of being in the power of their opponents. This fear in turn breeds a huge appetite for power, which is sought without restraint. This is the type of politics that has prevailed in Nigerian since independence (Alapiki 2015, 25).*

In conclusion, the modus operandi of the Nigeria State are the proclivity to resort to brute force and violence. Under this kind of politics, what prevails is lawlessness, militarization and the deployment of naked force in the quest to capture State power.

This is the nature and character of the Post-Colonial Nigerian State and politics. It is a State where the president possesses imperial powers, making it the most powerful in the world. Former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar, and the Presidential candidate of the people democratic party (PDP) in the 2019 general elections, alludes to this when he recounted his

bitter ordeal with President Obasanjo:

*The office of the President in Nigeria is the most powerful in the world because the president can literally unleash all the security agencies on an individual, undermine the national Assembly. This is not in the realm of speculation, it has been happening, I experienced it. I had a political face off with my boss (Pointblank news, cited in Onapajo, 2014, 44).*

Just to mention, the Nigerian State is a colonial bequeathal with some of its manifest attributes of absolutism and arbitrariness. The Nigerian nationalist inherited this instrument of State at independence. Ever since, the Nigerian State has remained a specific modality of class domination and a mode of production. Whereas the dominant social forces and its compradors struggled grimly to maintain and hold on to power, the opposing social forces struggled to dislodge it. It is this continuous struggle for power coupled with the glaring absence of reliable and responsible institution to mediate the arising conflict that have continued to make elections as a state of warfare. It is not surprising then that the Nigerian State have continued to regard election as warfare. We don't intend to detain you here; we shall proceed to interrogate the State perpetrated electoral violence during the 2019 general elections in Rivers State.

### **Methodology**

In this section, the design of the study, and instruments of data collection is made explicit. The data collection strategy, the study area is clearly defined. Data for this study is predominantly secondary. Data were collected using the documentary method: textbooks, newspapers, magazines, memoirs, transcripts of conversations, among others, which were eventually subjected to some form of content analysis.

### **Interrogating the 2019 General Elections in Rivers State**

Rivers State in the south-south geo-political zone of Nigeria once again gained notoriety on domestic and international media following the 2019 general elections (presidential/national assembly and governorship/state assembly) which arguably qualifies as the most violent, perpetrated by the Nigerian State. In the Niger Delta region, politics and elections is often characterized as high stakes, and contested between the State and opposition personalities. Elections oil rich Rivers State has always been marred by violence. Although there was no doubt, incidence of violence during the 2011 and 2015 general elections in Rivers State, the State experienced the worst election marked by most incidence of violence and loss of human lives during the 2019 general elections. This is explained by the ever-increasing fierce rivalry and competition between the federal government controlled All Progressive Congress (APC) of the centre, and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) controlled Rivers State, with Nyesom Wike as Governor.

In the oil rich Niger Delta Region, Rivers State with Port Harcourt as its capital is politically significant to Nigeria's political geography due to its location, size and endowed natural resources. Reports from the national Bureau of Statistics reveal that, the state has the second largest GDP after Lagos and has vast reserves of crude oil and natural gas. Added to this is the



fact that Rivers State means cash for politics. It is a widely held conception in Nigerian politics that, the desperation by the Nigerian State to win Rivers State stem from the fact that the oil producing states usually have the highest financial capacity to dole out fund for political parties funding. This partly accounts for the guest to conger Rivers State by the Nigerian State.

On the APC campaign ground in Port Harcourt a couple of weeks to the 2019 General Elections, the minister for transportation, Rotimi Amaechi speaking for the Nigerian State in the presence of President Muhammadu Buhari, promised to fight Wike like a man. At President Buhari's campaign rally in Port Harcourt few weeks to the elections, the Nigerian State declared war on Rivers people and the PDP. Speaking at the campaign rally in the presence of President Buhari and his cabinet members and other government functionaries, Amaechi, had resonated in war songs, he had declared: "You know it gets to a stage that a man must be a man. It gets to a stage a man cannot be any other thing but a man. Your Excellency (pointing to President Buhari) I'm not going to Abuja again. I'm here from today to the Election Day. On Saturday, they should get ready (referring to Wike, the PDP, and Rivers People). The support we want is that Mr. President should just thank us when we finish. We are ready for them" the video of this rally is still trending on YouTube under the title. General elections, Amaechi vows to battle Wike to the last.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

**Table 1:** Incidents of State Perpetrated Violence in 2019 General Elections in Rivers State

S\N	Incident	Date	No. of casualties
1	Invasion of the home of Dr. Tamunosisi Gogojaja, Rivers Commissioner for Education by this Nigerian Army	March 8, 2019	-----
2	Invasion of the palace and guest house of Chief Ateke Tom, Wike ally and, traditional ruler of Okochiri, by the Nigerian Army	March 8, 2019	1 civilian killed
3	Invasion of Abonema town by men of Nigerian Army	March 4, 2019	1 soldier, 40 civilians killed, 52 civilian wounded
4	Invasion of Abonema hospital by Nigerian Army, to prevent doctors from giving medical attention to gunshot victims	March 4, 2019	-----
5	Invasion of INEC collation center in Okrika by men of the Nigerian army	March 10, 2019	-----
6	Invasion of INEC collation center in Emouha LGA, by men of the Nigerian Army	March 10, 2019	-----
7	Invasion of Khana LGA INEC collation center by men of the Nigerian Army	March 10, 2019	One civilian (Dr. Ferry Gberegbe) shot and killed
8	Invasion and occupation of INEC Headquarters in Aba Road, Port Harcourt by operatives of the Nigerian Army	March 10, 2019	-----

**Source:** Culled from reports of Vanguard, Guardian, Tell, Leadership Newspapers, and Human Rights watch (2019).

Rivers State witnessed an unprecedented militarization of the electoral process as the Nigerian State security agencies were used against political opponents and the intimidation of voters. Few days before elections, the army moved in on perceived leaders and supporters of the government and the PDP in Port Harcourt. It raided their homes and arrested those it could. According to Mr. Ferdinand Alabraba, the chairman of the PDP campaign council in Rivers State alleged that the move by the military was to keep safely away, people that could swing votes for his party and intimidate voters (Tell 2019).

To begin with, barely 72 hours to the Presidential and National Assembly elections in Rivers State, Nigerian soldiers allegedly broke into the residence of an opposition stalwart and Wike's commissioner. According to The Cable (2019) CCTV footage showed how soldiers invaded the home of Rivers State Commissioner for Education, Dr. Tamunosisi Gogo-Jaja. In the viral video (which is still online via YouTube), at least five persons identified as family members of Dr. Gogo-Jaja were seen fleeing in a direction as armed soldiers barged into their GRA Phase 3 home in Port Harcourt, the Rivers State capital. Dr. Gogo-Jaja and his entire household were later whisked away by the fleet of fierce looking soldiers. Following the condemnation of the military by the PDP, army spokesperson and acting director, army public relations officer, col. Sagir Musa disagreed, saying the military will remain apolitical. Sagir Musa who issued a statement on March 9, 2019 said the Nigerian army has commenced a comprehensive forensic investigation of video showing soldiers and other security agents invading the residence of the Rivers State Commissioner for Education, Hon. Dr. Tamunosisi Gogo-Jaja (Leadership, 2019). The report of the investigation was never made known till date. It was the case of another unknown soldier, no apologies to Fela Anikulapo Kuti.

In the same vein, Chief Ateke Tom, a former Niger Delta agitator now a traditional ruler and associate of Wike had his home and guest house in Okochiri, Okrika local government area ransacked and vandalized by soldiers. The Independent (2019) reported that in the course of the 2019 Governorship and House of Assembly election in Rivers State, soldiers allegedly stormed the palace of Ateke Tom in a Commando style, perhaps in search of the king. In the course of the invasion, one John Ogbu was killed, while several other persons were arrested and taken to the 6 Division of the Nigeria Army in Port-Harcourt. In another viral video, another team of soldiers went for Asari Dokubo, an ex-agitator at his hometown in Kalabari area; however, they could not take him away due to the tension the mission raised (Tell 2019). A meeting of PDP leaders in a hotel in Port-Harcourt was raided and some of those in attendance arrested. The army did not only keep perceived opposition leaders away, it also stationed men and Armored Personnel Carriers within range of their homes and communities to indicate they were ready for battle (Tell, 2019).

The February 23, 2019 Presidential and National Assembly elections in Rivers State witnessed unbridled electoral violence perpetrated by the Nigeria State using the army and other security agencies. Trouble started after a soldier was allegedly shot and killed by thugs and supporters of the PDP who attempted to resist a troop of Nigeria army who aided APC supporters in the carting away of election materials to unknown destinations. After a soldier was killed in the town of Abonnema, in Rivers State on Election Day, soldiers shot at residents,

killing an unknown number of people. They also carried out sweeping arrest and arbitrarily detained several people. “The soldiers were on rampage, shooting at everyone around” said a 37-year old man who witnessed the episode. As I made my way to flee, I saw people dive into the river, many with gunshot wounds. The next day I saw three dead bodies riddled with bullets floating on the water. I heard many more bodies were later recovered from that river. A local nongovernmental group told Human Rights Watch that 40 people were killed and at least 52 people were injured (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

A 43-year-old voter said that security agents arrested the only medical doctor at Abonnema's only health facility, allegedly to prevent him from treating gunshot victims. The doctor was detained for more than three days at Bori Camp, a military base in Port-Harcourt, the man said. A hospital staff member told me that the army officers carried the boy the doctor was treating and left him outside on the bare floor to die as they took the doctor with them (Human Rights watch 2019).

As the Presidential elections approached the stage of collation of results, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) officials accused the military of disrupting elections in several local government areas of the State. The INEC official accused the army of specifically interfering with and disrupting collation of results in Rivers State. The INEC Electoral Officer in Okrika Local Government Area, Mr. Leo Okon narrated how army personnel led by one captain Inuwa, invaded INEC office in the Rivers East Senatorial district collation centre in Port-Harcourt. Mr. Leo Okon stated that:

*Before the results were snatched, soldiers threatened the collation officials by shooting sporadically into the air. At the end of polls, there were heavy gunshots. Electoral officials could not collate form EC 8a at the polling units. They opted to come to INEC office in Okrika for solace and continue filling form EC 8a. During collation of ward results, a team of soldiers led by captain Inuwa ordered the suspension of collation. He ordered his men to take away all materials, including results being collated by the collation officials (Guardian, 2019).*

The INEC Electoral Officers for IKwerre and Emuoha Local Government Areas, Mrs. Mary Imawuya and Mr. Kenneth Etah, respectively, also narrated how military personnel disrupted collation exercise in their collation centers. The military invaded INEC offices in those local government areas. Officers and men of the military did not allow the ad-hoc staff to carry out collation as they shot sporadically to scare people away.

Irrespective of the violence that greeted the Presidential and National Assembly elections of the February 23, 2019, Rivers people still turned out in their numbers on March 9, 2019 to elect their Governor and State House of Assembly members. The governorship election was not anything different from the Presidential and National Assembly elections as the military again, went on rampage. The military and operatives of the Federal Swift Anti Robbery Squad (F-SARS) at the orders of their pay masters went on rampage, harassing and intimidating voters, shooting at them and snatching ballot boxes and election results. The violence by the

military was so much that in some places, voters decided to stay away from polling units. They opted to remain home rather than go out and be killed or injured, as was the case in the Presidential elections. There were several incidents of violence by the Nigerian military during the elections as soldiers and F-SARS operatives took over collation centers, shooting and killing innocent voters to achieve their aims. Soldiers and F-SARS took over the collation centers in virtually all local government areas and even the INEC headquarters, Aba Road, Port-Harcourt. The NA barring all accredited agents and INEC officers, domestic/foreign election observer missions, took over the collation exercise. The situation was very explosive that the people who dared question the actions of the army met severe consequences including death. And indeed, there was loss of lives as the unarmed voters tried to resist the heavily armed soldiers.

At Khana Local Government Area Collation Centre, Dr. Ferry Gberegbe, a lecturer with Ken Saro–Wiwa Polytechnic, Bori, Rivers State, was shot in his lower abdomen by men of F-SARS led by ACP Akin Fakorede, he died a few days later from the gunshot wound. In Degema, one Mrs. Ibisaki Amaechi was shot dead by men of the Nigerian army. In Okrika and some parts of Rivers, military personnel who stormed the communities to hijack electoral materials before and after voting were resisted by women who stripped half-naked to form a human shield. The women not only prevented soldiers from carting away election materials, but also escorted INEC Staff to INEC Headquarters (Vanguard 2019). Some of the brave women used their menstrual blood to stop soldiers in Rivers, as the youths and men of the communities became vulnerable to the trigger-happy soldiers and F-SARS operatives (Vanguard 2019).

The violence got messier at INEC Headquarters at Aba Road, Port Harcourt, where collation was taken place and results to be announced. Soldiers had taken over collation exercise, searching and screening accredited INEC ad-hoc staff, including barring domestic and international election observers and monitoring teams. The soldiers also drove away Policemen at INEC Headquarters, a situation which led to a clash between the soldiers and the Police who were detailed to man the collation center of INEC in Port Harcourt. In the process, tear gas canisters were shot, causing panic among the INEC officials, party agents, and journalists, as well as election observers who were gathered for announcement of the results (Channels, 2019). This unfortunate incident led to the announcement by INEC of the indefinite suspension of the Governorship election collation exercise in Port Harcourt. The election went into coma for several weeks and was later revived through life support.

Decrying military intervention in the Governorship and State Assembly elections, INEC had come down hard on the Nigerian Army over the way and manner its men invaded the elections. Mr. Festus Okoye, INEC National Commissioner and Chairman, Information and Voter Education Committee, in a statement in Abuja said the suspension of the election was as a result of the invasion of the collation center by soldiers and armed gangs. Okoye stated that:

*Collation centers were invaded by some soldiers and armed gangs resulting in the intimidation and unlawful arrest of election officials, thereby disrupting the collation process. The commission will engage with key stakeholders in Rivers State with a view to ensuring a smooth and peaceful completion of the process (Guardian, 2019).*

In the same vein, the European Union (EU) Election Observation Mission Nigeria 2019, the International Republican Institute (IRI), the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and other foreign election monitors, condemned in strong terms, the violent acts perpetrated by the Nigerian Army during the election. The EU and other Election Observation Mission (EOM) indicting the Nigerian Army, the EU and other Election Observation Mission (EOM), in a unanimous report contended that the Presidential and National Assembly elections and the Governorship and State Assembly elections were hugely marred by the involvement of military personnel, stating that it did not conform with international best practice (This Day, 2019).

Relying on reports from its Independent Observers, the United Kingdom (UK) slammed an indictment on the Nigeria Army over its acts of violence particularly during the Governorship and State Assembly elections in Rivers State. In its verified official tweeter handle, @Ukinnigeria, the UK said:

*Extremely concerned by reports, including from @Ukinnigeria observers, of military interference in the election process in Rivers State. Monitoring the situation closely@inec staff must be allowed to do their jobs in safety, without intimidation (Premium Times, 2019).*

However, for objectivity and value free, unbiased analysis, it is pertinent to state that the military denied the indictment by INEC, International Election Observer Missions, the EU and the UK. The army had swiftly faulted the indictment by INEC, accusing it of betrayal. Following INEC' report on the suspended Rivers gubernatorial election, Col. Aminu Illiyasu, spokesman for the 6 Division of the Nigerian Army had accused the Festus Okoye led INEC report of lacking sincerity (Vanguard, 2019). In the same vein, the army flayed the EU, UK and other Election Observer Missions in Nigeria, accusing them of interference and meddlesomeness in Nigeria's internal affairs. The army in a statement by its spokesman Sagir Musa further alleged that politicians gave hoodlums military uniforms which confused members of the public (This Day Live, 2019). The question to ask are therefore: how may we explain that fake solders adorned in full military regalia and wielding Armored Personnel Carriers could not be identified amid the original army? How may we explain that all the investigations the army said it was conducting were never made public till date? Indeed, it was the story of Fela Kuti and another unknown soldier.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This study examined the Nigerian State and Electoral Violence. It interrogated the election violence perpetrated by the Nigerian State during the 2019 general elections in Rivers State. The Nigerian State has never been a “neutral arbiter” in election and other facets of society like its counterparts in the advanced capitalist States of Europe and USA. The coercive instruments of the State had always served as a veritable vessel for those who control the State.

In that light, the Nigerian State have, from independence been regarded as an economic empire for primitive accumulation. This accounted for the unprecedented electoral violence perpetrated by the Nigerian State in the 2019 general elections in Rivers State. As video

evidence, reports of both International Election Observer Missions and their local counterparts, including reports from INEC Headquarters in Abuja, this study found that the Nigerian State regrettably, perpetrated electoral violence in the 2019 general elections in Rivers State. This singular act by the State using its coercive apparatus does not augur well for our democracy.

### Recommendations

1. Political restructuring of the country has become imperative. The objective will be to enthrone a truly classical system according to the Wherian doctrine of federalism, as practiced by the USA and Canada and others. A truly federal system, devoid of the present militarist federal system will be a better panacea to mitigate State perpetrated electoral violence.
2. A continuous consolidation of the country's extant electoral laws and punishment of electoral offenders will strengthen Nigeria's democracy
3. Professionalization of the armed forces have become inevitable

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